

United States Senate

March 12, 2015

COMMITTEES
ARMED SERVICES
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION
AND FORESTRY
HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
SMALL BUSINESS
AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

I am glad to see gains are being made by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Kurdish Peshmerga against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), but I am concerned Iran, the largest state sponsor of terrorism in the world, continues to expand its military and political influence in Iraq. The relationship between Iran and Iraqi Shia militia groups, now often referred to as “popular mobilization units” is close, as both work hand-in-hand in military operations against ISIS in Iraq.

As a veteran who served in both Kuwait and Iraq during the Iraq War, and as a Member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I have a duty to ensure neither American taxpayer dollars, nor the efforts of our service members, go towards supporting our adversaries. I believe the Administration must increase its oversight of the Iraq Train-and-Equip mission to ensure neither US military support, nor equipment, is obtained by Iranian supported or controlled Iraqi Shia militia.

Over the past 12 years of Iranian involvement in Iraq, sectarianism and an anti-Iraqi Sunni and Kurd strategy has been the cornerstone of Iran’s political and military policy in Iraq. In order to accomplish this, Iran developed strong relationships with Iraqi Shia militias and history has shown Iran will continue to use its relationship with Iraqi Shia militia groups to work in its own self-interest.

During the Iraq War, Iran sought to undermine US and Iraqi interests by providing weapons and training to Iraqi Shia militia groups to kill both Americans and Iraqis. Many American service members were killed and wounded by militants of Iraqi Shia militia groups Jaish al-Mahdi, today known as the “Peace Brigades,” and US military designated Special Groups also known as Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq, Kata’ib Hezbollah, and the Promised Day Brigades. Iraq War veterans will tell you some of the most effective types of improvised explosive devices used against them were Explosively Formed Projectiles or EFPs. EFPs were specifically designed for these Iraqi Shia militia groups by Iran to be used against American service members and their equipment.

Recently, some of these Iranian supported or controlled Iraqi Shia militia groups defeated ISIS in much of Diyala Province, Iraq. In their efforts to defeat ISIS in Diyala, there have been multiple claims the Iraqi Shia militia groups committed war crimes by murdering Iraqis or destroying their property.¹ However, it remains to be seen if alleged war crimes committed by Iranian

¹ BBC News, “Iraq probes alleged massacre by Shia militia in Diyala” BBC News, January 29, 2015;
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31037426>

supported or controlled Iraqi Shia militia groups is a matter of policy supported by Iranian advisors.

Presently, Iranian advisors are leading Iraqi Shia militia groups and ISF units in Tikrit. The commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force, General Qasem Soleimani, who was responsible for Iranian special operations missions against American service members during the Iraq War, now appears to play a primary role in advising Iraqi Shia militia and ISF at Tikrit.²

In closing, I would request a detailed response from your Administration regarding the frequency and the amount of equipment we have provided to the Iraqi government which has then been provided to Iraqi Shia militia groups supported or controlled by Iran. Furthermore, I would request a detailed response to the level of support and equipment provided by the Iraqi government to Kurdish Peshmerga and Sunni tribal forces, and if that support has been received in a less timely manner than the support provided to Iraqi Shia militia from the Iraqi government.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


Joni Ernst
United States Senator

² Paul McLeary, "Iranian General Again in Iraq for Tikrit Offensive" DefenseNews, March 2, 2015; <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense-news/blog/intercepts/2015/03/02/iraq-iran-is-war-terrorism/24270363/>